

***E. coli* O157:H7**

□ WHAT IS IT?

E. coli are bacteria that normally live in the intestines of humans and animals. There are many strains of *E. coli* bacteria. Most of them are harmless. However, one particular strain, *E. coli* O157:H7, may cause serious illness in people.

□ SYMPTOMS

- ✓ Diarrhea (which often becomes bloody) and painful stomach cramps
- ✓ Fever is mild or absent
- ✓ Symptoms appear from 1 - 10 days after exposure, usually 2 - 4 days.

✓ In some cases *E. coli* O157:H7 causes a complication that damages the kidneys called hemolytic uremic syndrome, or HUS. This is more common in children and the elderly.

□ HOW IS IT SPREAD?

- ✓ *E. coli* O157:H7 lives in the intestines of cattle.
- ✓ It can spread from people through ingestion of raw or undercooked meat, unpasteurized milk, contaminated water, and by foods which were contaminated by raw beef products.
- ✓ *E. coli* O157:H7 can also be spread by contact with animals at petting zoos or farms if good hand washing is not done.
- ✓ *E. coli* O157:H7 infections spread easily from person to person when an infected person fails to wash hands well after a bowel movement or stool contaminates food, water, or surfaces that others touch.

□ DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

- ✓ *E. coli* O157:H7 is diagnosed by testing a stool sample using a special test that is not available in all laboratories. If an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection is suspected, a health care provider must request a stool culture for *E. coli* O157:H7.
- ✓ Antibiotic treatment is not recommended for *E. coli* O157:H7 diarrhea and may make the disease worse. Most people get better in a few days on their own.
- ✓ As with any diarrhea, it is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration (fluid loss).

- ✓ Do not use anti-diarrhea medicines for *E. coli* O157:H7 diarrhea.

□ PREVENTION

- ✓ Contaminated meat looks and smells normal so it is important to cook all meat, especially ground beef, thoroughly (to 160° F). Cooked meat should be grey or brown (not pink) throughout. There should be no bloody juices.
- ✓ There is no risk from *E. coli* O157:H7 if the meat is thoroughly cooked.
- ✓ If you are served pink meat, especially hamburger, in a restaurant, send it back for further cooking.
- ✓ Wash hands thoroughly using soap and warm water after handling raw meat, going to the bathroom or changing a diaper, and before preparing or eating food..
- ✓ Clean all utensils and surfaces after contact with raw meat.
- ✓ Drink only pasteurized milk and juices and eat only milk products (for example cheese) made with pasteurized milk.
- ✓ Wash (or peel) fruit and vegetables thoroughly.
- ✓ Teach children good hygiene habits.
- ✓ Keep infected children away from other children and the elderly and follow your health care provider's advice about returning to school or child care.

Report all cases to the Health Department by calling (206) 296 - 4774.